



LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN MASSACHUSETTS

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Executive Summary

The Landscape Analysis maps the current landscape of personalized learning in K-12 Massachusetts districts by inventorying known practices and digital infrastructure that support personalized learning. It provides a preliminary attempt to understand district readiness and progress on the pathway to personalizing learning. The [Massachusetts Personalized Learning Edtech \(MAPLE\) Consortium](#) will continue to expand and update these initial findings. Personalized learning seeks to accelerate student learning by tailoring the instructional environment – the what, when, how and where students learn – to address the individual needs, skills and interests of each student.

Goals of the Landscape Analysis

The Landscape Analysis will provide a baseline on which to develop metrics to measure progress in personalizing learning in Massachusetts districts, identify school exemplars to share successful practices with educators, inform public discussions about educational priorities, and assist organizations in supporting the transformation of learning and teaching practices in Massachusetts to better prepare all students for their futures. Additionally, the Landscape Analysis will serve as a guide for programming for the MAPLE Consortium.

Methodology

The Landscape Analysis is guided by three key questions:

1. What is the prevalence of personalized learning practices in Massachusetts school districts?
2. What is the prevalence and depth of such practices in MAPLE's 15 Catalyst Districts¹?
3. What is the level of technical infrastructure readiness to support personalizing learning in Massachusetts public school districts?

Data was collected from multiple sources, qualitative and quantitative, using three methods: (1) a statewide personalized learning survey of each school district, (2) in-depth focus group interviews and conversations with Catalyst Districts about their path to personalized learning, and (3) a technical infrastructure assessment collected by the Massachusetts Statewide Building Authority in 2016.

What is Personalized Learning?

Personalized learning seeks to accelerate student learning by tailoring the instructional environment – the what, when, how and where students learn – to address the individual needs, skills, and interests of each student. Since personalized learning includes various elements and allows for greater variety in what students are working on, it will look different across classrooms, schools, and districts. The Landscape Analysis began to collect samples of how Massachusetts districts are implementing various elements of personalized learning:

- “We are working with students in grades 1-2 in a station rotation model that allows us to utilize blended learning and a very flexible model to address skill mastery in decoding.” (Beverly)
- “Middle school teachers have a project where the students were modeling their understanding of the content using a topic of their choice and following tutorials presented online with support from the teacher as well.” (Northampton)
- “High School students have an amazing variety of courses and pathways to graduation. External learning opportunities exist for all. Courses are taught in many modalities.” (Natick)
- “Teachers have used daily data meetings to determine individualized instruction ” (Saugus)

1. Catalyst Districts are the MAPLE member districts that are most engaged and strategically committed to personalizing learning.

Key Findings

1. Massachusetts districts are embracing strategies to personalize learning in order to differentiate instruction, better engage students, and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.
2. Traditional teacher-led classroom practices, with the entire class covering the same content at the same pace, are still the most common instructional practices in Massachusetts. 75% of responding districts report that similar content covered at the same pace is “always” or “often” the norm in their schools, and over 70% of districts report that traditional whole-class, teacher-led instruction is “always” or “often” the norm in their schools, as illustrated in the chart below.

Figure 1. Important problems solved by personalized learning

What is one important problem personalized learning might solve?	% Districts Responding
Differentiating Instruction	40%
Student Engagement ²	26%
Meeting Needs of a Diversity of Students	23%

Figure 2. Statewide classroom practices and student experiences (% of respondents)



2. Student engagement includes enhancing student voice and choice, and enrollment retention strategies

3. While districts are employing some elements of personalized learning, such as using performance assessments of higher-order applications of skills or Response to Intervention (RTI)³, relatively few at this time are using real world challenges, peer or individualized coaching, or dynamic grouping.
4. The most common challenges for districts to expand personalizing learning in their schools are in the areas of teacher and principal professional development, resource constraints (i.e. time and funds), and educators experiencing what personalizing learning looks like in practice. Demand from educators to “see personalized learning in action” means it is important for MAPLE to share the bright spots in Catalyst Districts with other educators.
5. Collectively, districts have not yet identified clear metrics to judge progress and effectiveness of moving towards personalized learning practices. However, there is a strong desire to learn more about which measures would be appropriate to better judge this progress.
6. Digital technologies are tools to enable educators to personalize instruction for students. “Technical readiness” for personalizing learning varies across the state. Most districts have sufficient WAN and LAN capacity, except for rural districts. Districts vary widely in terms of the computing devices available to their students.
 - a. Only 303 (16%) of schools meet all three criteria (LAN capacity, WAN capacity, one device per student) to be deemed ready to scale personalized learning.
 - b. Almost half of schools (49%) however, have sufficient technical capabilities to introduce personalized learning practices.
 - c. All MAPLE districts exceed the state averages in all three criteria.

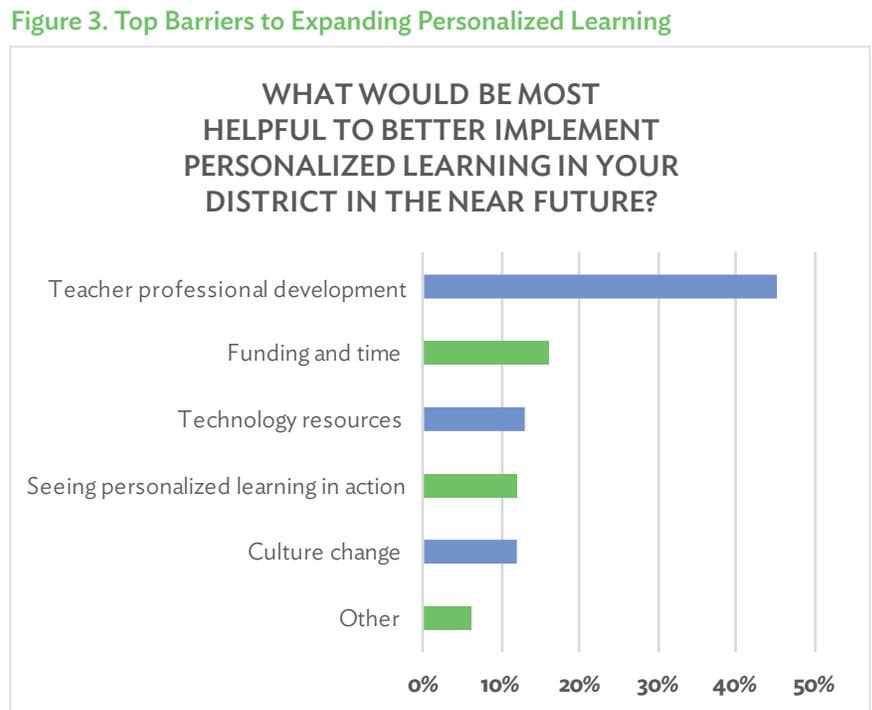


Figure 4. Schools with sufficient LAN and WAN capacity and device ratios of 1:1 to 3:1

Number of Schools:	All MA School Districts	Urban Network Districts	MAPLE Consortium Districts	MAPLE Catalysts Districts	Rural/CES Districts ⁵
With 1 device per 1 student	303 (16%)	71 (12%)	96 (32%)	45 (43%)	21 (25%)
With 1 device per 2 students	391 (21%)	146 (25%)	73 (25%)	35 (34%)	13 (16%)
With 1 device per 3 students	227 (12%)	62 (11%)	28 (9%)	14 (13%)	7 (8%)
Total Schools	921 (49%)	279 (49%)	197 (67%)	94 (90%)	41 (49%)

7. There is an equity gap. Disadvantaged students are most likely to be in the schools that are least prepared technically to offer personalized learning.
 - a. Urban districts, with the highest proportion of disadvantaged students, are least prepared technically due to device limitations. Only 12% of students in urban districts are in schools with one device per student.
 - b. 43% of Catalyst schools, largely suburban and better-resourced, support one to one.

3. RTI = Response to Intervention 4. As recommended by MA DESE and MAPLE 5. Districts in the Collaborative for Educational Services

8. The MAPLE Catalyst districts are, for the most part, leading in most measures of readiness and progress to personalizing learning. However, these districts are still early in their transition to personalizing learning.
 - a. Most Catalyst Districts have strategic plans that include personalized learning elements, but only a few have comprehensive plans.
 - b. Catalyst Districts have strong technical readiness compared to other districts in the state.
 - c. Catalyst Districts are more likely to be conducting professional development to support their teachers' and leaders' moves to personalize instruction, including professional development programming on developing an innovation culture, project-based learning and blended learning.

The MAPLE Consortium

The MAPLE Consortium is a public-private partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the LearnLaunch Institute. A consortium of 32 school districts representing one out of every six students in Massachusetts public schools, MAPLE's goal is to support the growth of personalizing learning throughout the state, so each learner may thrive. In this first year, the consortium is comprised of 15 "Catalyst Districts," those that have made a strategic commitment to personalizing learning for all students, and 17 General Members that are beginning to work towards personalizing learning. www.learnlaunch.org/maple

LearnLaunch Institute

LearnLaunch Institute catalyzes a community that drives innovation to transform learning and increase achievement. Our education innovation ecosystem mobilizes educators, entrepreneurs, learners, investors, and industry affiliates. As a nonprofit, the Institute offers learning opportunities and connections to individuals, support services to schools, and a district network. We believe in expanding access to learning that is engaging, personalized, and effective. Edtech is a critical component of achieving this vision at scale. For more information and our upcoming events, visit www.learnlaunch.org or follow us [@LearnLaunch](https://twitter.com/LearnLaunch).

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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